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Man and the natural world

Paul W. Taylor's concept of species egalitarianism

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1. Biocentric turn

Ethical reflection on the environment appears to be a necessary element in deliberation on the world in which we live. The progressive degradation of the natural environment gives rise to a question about the origin of this process and ways of constraining it. Environmental ethics, which is a sphere of such special consideration, already today contains some theoretical positions offering different diagnoses and remedies for the widespread ecological crisis. Next to anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism-"sentientism," ecocentrism, ecofeminism and deep ecology, significant debates are also conducted within the domain of the so-called biocentrism. This trend holds that unfavourable changes can be hindered by adopting a different outlook on the world. One needs to realise that it is not only the human being that stands at the centre of the existing world, but that every being with its intrinsic dynamic process of life is of inherent worth. Thus, biocentrism is essentially opposed to anthropocentrism (man's central standing in the world) and to some extent to non-anthropocentrism-"sentientism" (central standing of sentient creatures). Philosophy regards the following figures as the major originators of this extended outlook on the natural world: Albert Schweitzer, Kenneth Goodpaster, Robin

Attfield and Paul W. Taylor.[1] In the Polish philosophical reflection this position is represented by Zdzisława Piątek.

The present paper shall focus its analysis only on Paul Taylor's views, and to be precise - on his concept of biocentric egalitarianism (species egalitarianism). The concept is a project to which the author devoted a lot of his energies and coverage, and which appears to be controversial. Thus, it provokes analysis and consideration, and eventually leads to a statement as to the degree of its plausibility. Taylor presented the concept by advancing four theses, which here will become the focus of consideration. We will trace their significance, their interrelationships, and take a critical look at them, providing a positive proposal to solve the emerging dilemmas.

To begin with, we should precisely define the ethical profile of Paul Taylor's deliberation. His type of reflection results in going beyond the confines of traditional ethics, which is essentially related to human individuals and interhuman relations within the *Homo sapiens* community. This turn follows from the fact that the American thinker can discern the necessity to include the nonhuman world in ethical reflection. This necessity is already indicated in Taylor's definition of environmental ethics, which he called reflection on "the moral relationship that hold between humans and the natural world."[2] In view of the foregoing, one might say that the philosopher originated a new type of philosophical consideration, in which moral relevance arises from a different understanding of the phenomenon of life. It is a type of ethics for a bio-community, where man is only one of the species, and where the greatest emphasis is laid on the phenomenon of life of all wildlife.

[1] See J. B. Callicott, *Environmental Ethics*, [in:] *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, ed. S. G. Post, vol. 2, New York 2003, p. 760.

[2] P. W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature. A Theory of Environmental Ethics*, Princeton 1986, p. 3.

2. The theses of species egalitarianism

In his book entitled *Respect for Nature. A Theory of Environmental Ethics* Paul Taylor proposes four major theses concerned with the status of living beings and the relations between them. The theses are as follows:

(1) Humans are members of the Earth's Community of Life in the same sense and on the same terms in which other living things are members of that Community.

(2) The human species, along with all other species, are integral elements in a system of interdependence. The survival of each living thing, as wet as its chances of faring well or poorly, is determined not only by the physical conditions of its environment but also by its relations to other living things.

(3) All organisms are teleological centres of life in the sense that each is a unique individual pursuing its own good in its own way.

(4) Humans are not inherently superior to other living things.[3]

Taylor elaborated proper significance for these theses. And so it is necessary to take a close look at the author's intentions, as well as to follow through the main aspects that the philosopher discerned and developed within the theses, which he also termed *beliefs*. Here it is also important to emphasise a vital premise accepted by Taylor. He analyses the status of beings and their interrelations, taking into account the things they have in common. With regard to human beings, he is convinced that we are members of a biological species, which determines the basic characteristic of our being. Hence, even though he recognises the existing differences between man and the rest of nature, he is not interested in them; in a way he leaves them aside.[4]

[3] Cf. ibidem, pp. 99–100. Earlier, the author propounded these theses in the paper: *The Ethics of Respect for Nature*, „Environmental Ethics", vol. 3, 1981, pp. 197–218.

[4] See P. W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature*…, op. cit., p. 101.

2.1. Man as a citizen of the earth's community of life

Under the first thesis Taylor enumerates five different aspects. The first one refers to biological and physical requirements for existence and survival, which man shared with other creatures of the natural world. All creatures inhabiting our planet depend on the relations with the natural environment for their existence. This dependence has a crucial bearing on the development of further properties, which means that many further features of a given form of life cannot emerge unless there are proper physical and biological conditions present in the environment. Taylor writes in regard to man that "survival itself and at least a certain minimum level of health and strength are necessary conditions for pursuit of other human values."[5]

The other aspect of this proposition points to a given being's own good. Every being - both human and nonhuman - has a good of its own, the realisation of which depends on the determinants which we cannot always control. As he speaks about a given being's own good, Taylor means the good related to its life and development, regardless of relations with other beings. He points out that "if we can say […] that something is good for a given entity or bad for it, without reference to any *other* entity, then the entity has a good of its own."[6] Realisation of such a good, even in the case of man, is not completely dependent on his efforts. The philosopher points out that denying this truth is a manifestation of arrogance and man's illusory superiority, and the effects of this self-delusion bring about negative experiences in our lives.[7]

The third aspect of the first thesis is concerned with free will, autonomy and social freedom. In their fundamental dimension they apply to man only. Only man is capable of making choices between different options, being guided by his own rational cognition. Besides, only man can set himself goals to attain and thus shape his future. Finally, only man can

[5] Ibidem, p. 103.
[6] Ibidem, p. 61.
[7] See ibidem, p. 104.

enjoy the so-called social or political freedom. The point here is about the possibility of influencing social and political structures that define the living conditions for an individual. But in Taylor's opinion there is another dimension, the fourth one, which can be plausibly related to all beings in the earth's community of life. The philosopher defines it thus: "For being free in this sense is being able to preserve one's existence and further one's good, and being unfree in this sense is being unable to do these things."[8]

This perception of freedom, as Taylor claims, is akin to the concept of an "absence of constraint." The point here is about independence of various types of constraint. The philosopher points to the following kinds: inner and outer constraints; active and passive constraints. The outer constraint is usually connected with circumstances or factors external to an entity. The inner types of constraint are stimuli or states to be found inside an entity. Active types of constraint are connected with the operation of some factor; the passive ones imply an absence of something necessary – being devoid of something. And so Taylor formulates the following pairs of various kinds of dependence: (a) outer active – e.g. a closed door, a barbed wire barrier, physical violence or torture; (b) inner active – obsessive-compulsive thoughts and uncontrollable desires, extreme physiological needs, e.g. food, sleep; (c) outer passive – a lack of money, food, potable water, or medical care; (d) inner passive – a lack of knowledge, professional qualifications, ill health, physical and mental handicap.[9]

This type of freedom primarily refers to human entities. However, Taylor claims that this type of thinking can also be related to animals and plants. Every time an organism – either a sensitive or a vegetative one – is capable of realising its own good in its own specific way (realisation of biological functions), we can say that it is free. Taylor openly states:

> an organism may be said to be free if it has the ability and opportunity to promote and protect its good according to the laws of its nature. To the extent that there

[8] Ibidem, p. 106.
[9] Ibidem, p. 107n.

> are constraints that make it difficult or impossible for an organism to realize its good, to that extent it is unfree.[10]

The types of compulsion that can be distinguished in nonhuman beings are connected with impediments to the realisation of their own food because of some environmental conditions, a lack of appropriate means to promote and protect their own good, health anomalies, or a lack of normal properties, e.g. an acquired vision defect.[11]

In animals, the most easily recognisable symptom of a lack of freedom is restricted freedom of movement resulting from being kept in a cage, a trap or on a chain. Regaining freedom will thus consist in removing such restrictions. In plants – as Taylor observes – one can also point to symptoms of compulsion, and by extension to ways of becoming free from them. An example of compulsion on a plant (a tree, a bush) can be a lack of space for unrestricted growth, when its roots are crammed into a container that is not big enough. Moving a plant to the natural environment will serve as a kind of liberation, restoring its freedom.

The above analyses address some basic kind of freedom. It applies to both humans, animals and plants. This freedom, as the absence of positive and negative constraints, is an instrumental good for all beings. Thanks to it, every creature can realise its basic good, which is a free expression of its existence. And as Taylor observes in this context, "to be free is to have a better chance to live the best kind of life we are capable of."[12]

The fourth aspect of the first thesis refers to the shared origin of man and other species inhabiting the Earth. Taylor points out that *Homo sapiens* individuals emerged as a result of the operative mechanism of evolution, natural selection and genetic inheritance, just like any other living organism. He even observes that man is a relative "latecomer" and that his emergence was preceded by other species which had constructed networks of mutual relations and interaction. On the basis of estimated

[10] Ibidem, p. 109.
[11] See ibidem.
[12] Ibidem, p. 111.

data, Taylor writes that man appeared on Earth between 400,000 and 500,000 years ago. Compared with the geological age of the Earth, such a time-frame is relatively short.

The system thanks to which made it possible for man to appear on Earth had been in place much longer. And it was only thanks to its efficient operation that it was possible for human beings to emerge. As he takes such a view of the matter, Taylor has no choice but to conclude that "we no longer see ourselves as special objects of creation. We are the product of a system that has produced every other kind of living being."[13] The point here is of course the process of evolution. Its "factors that governed our original emergence were not different from those that gave rise to all other creatures."[14] The claim that the emergence of man was the culmination of the process of evolution is – according to the philosopher – an indication of man's vanity.

The fifth aspect of Taylor's first thesis is about pointing to man's dependence on the Earth's ecological system and to the fact that man's presence in it is not necessary. The philosopher points out that humans are totally dependent on the condition of the natural environment for their existence, which cannot be demonstrated in reverse. The "health" and harmony of the earth's biosphere is not dependent on man in the slightest degree. Only man is incapable of existence and self-protection without help from the natural order of nature. As far as this order remains intact, at least in its foundations, human beings can exist and develop freely. As Taylor writes: "our dependence on the general integrity of the whole realm of life is absolute."[15] And so radical and unfavourable changes to the environment pose a serious threat to the survival of the human species.

This cannot be said of the reverse relation. The crisis of human creatures which would result in their slow extinction or even complete disappearance should not have a negative effect on the biosphere. With its

[13] Ibidem, p. 112.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] Ibidem, p. 114.

natural systems, the Earth will continue existing unless the disappearance of the *Homo sapiens* individuals amounts to the annihilation of the natural world (e.g. as a result of nuclear war). However, in a different situation, e.g. as a result of the extinction of *Homo sapiens* caused by typically human disease, the environment will continue to exist. But that's not all, the natural world might actually even benefit from the disappearance of man. The earth's community of life, as a whole, will benefit from the absence of the human being. Here Taylor mentions the cessation of the destruction of natural habitats which has been taking place wherever new housing estates, factories and airports are built.

The departure of man from this world would also mean the end of the degradation of the natural environment resulting from the widespread use of contemporary technologies, uncontrolled birth rate or excessive consumption. The philosopher directly points to the beneficial effects of man's absence from Earth: the ecosystems will recover the balance, tropical forests will regain their beneficial effect on the planet's climate, the polluted seas and oceans will become liberated from noxious substances in several centuries' time. Volcanic eruptions and periods of glaciation will be the only factors that might upset the environmental harmony. Taylor is convinced that the Earth's community of life, now free from man, will regain its vitality and developmental dynamics. He states the following:

> The final disappearance of *Homo sapiens*, then, not only would the Earth's Community of Life continue to exist but in all probability its well-being would be enhanced. Our presence, in short, is not needed.[16]

2.2. The human species in the network of interdependence

Taylor's second thesis addresses the question of interdependence between the organisms belonging to the earth's community of life. It is about the connections and relations between both individuals and

[16] Ibidem, p. 114n.

species. The whole natural world is characterised by a rich complexity of mutual relations, relationships and references. Thus arises a certain, complex network of ecosystems. As Taylor observes:

> all the different ecosystems that make up the earth's biosphere fit together in such a way that when one is radically or totally destroyed, an adjustment takes place in others and the whole structure undergoes a certain shift.[17]

This shows that no ecosystem or its constitutive living creatures can be regarded in isolation from other elements of this type. No one of them is an isolated whole. That which occurs in one ecosystem has an effect on another one. Taylor calls this complex whole the "natural world."[18]

This proposition carries implications for the human being. Like any other living creature, man is a part of the earth's community of life. In its existence and development, it is dependent on other beings and ecosystems. Therefore, man cannot destroy or radically weaken them, because in doing that he reduces his chances of survival and realisation of the uniquely human values.

However, Taylor is not in favour of a holistic or organicist ethic. He does not want to say that the interrelationships between organisms and ecosystems constitute some *quasi*-organism and that some specific moral norms follow from its workings. Because in a case like this the norm of moral conduct would be defined from the viewpoint of the whole: its good, vitality and dynamism. Although he can discern the extensive network of interrelationships, Taylor is in favour of singling out the value of each individual being as a separate good. It is only this particular being that delineates (engenders) rights: the right for its expression and realisation, and the resultant obligations - the obligation to preserve and promote the good, which is binding upon those who are aware of it.[19]

[17] Ibidem, p. 117.
[18] Ibidem.
[19] See ibidem, p. 118.

2.3. Organisms as teleological centres of life

Taylor's third thesis points out the fact that all living things are teleological centres of life. Each one is an entity striving to realise its own inherent good. His cognitive approach is realised in certain stages.

The philosopher first points out that becoming cognisant of the structure of organisms enables better understanding of their life and development, in accordance with the laws of a given species, but also of their effect on other living things. Then comes the knowledge of these living organisms as *sui generis* beings, as certain *individua*. In this context Taylor mentions work done by scientists who, as they study living organisms, can discern their uniqueness: "close observation [of them] over an extended period of time, whether in the laboratory or in the field, has led them [the experimenters] to an appreciation of the unique «personalities» of their subjects."[20]

And that is no privilege reserved for scientists. Taylor is of the opinion that every nature lover can discover this individuality of plants and animals. Communing with a living thing for some time, coupled with careful observation, lets one form an opinion that its manner of living is unique. Taylor is convinced that such an observer can even become involved in a given being's fate, its good and bad fortunes. He claims that

> The organism comes to mean something to one as a unique, irreplaceable individual. Finally one achieves a genuine understanding of its point of view. One can then imaginatively place oneself in the organism's situation and look at the world from its standpoint.[21]

This transition from the objective knowledge of an entity to the recognition of its individuality and eventually to the realisation of its viewpoint is – in Taylor's opinion – an approach to that which we call the cognition of an individual living entity.

[20] Ibidem, p. 120.
[21] Ibidem.

Thanks to it we learn what it means to approach a given organism as a teleological centre of life which strives to preserve itself and realise its own good in its own peculiar way.[22] As regards a given entity the striving does not have to be conscious. Both plants and animals remain teleological centres of life, even if they do not realise this and do not take any intentional actions aimed at achieving their goals. Taylor adds that:

> all organisms, whether conscious or not, are teleological centers of life in the sense that each is a unified, coherently ordered system of goal-oriented activities that has a constant tendency to protect and maintain the organism's existence.[23]

The individual viewpoint, which is connected with the unique "personhood" of a plant or animal, is determined by a one-of-a-kind way in which they respond to environmental stimuli, interact with other organisms, and in which they undergo changes determined by cycles of life and development of a given species. Man can come to know this individual viewpoint of a plant or an animal, when he looks at these beings in an objective way, that is while suspending his feelings, intentions or interests. Besides, this will be possible once the human entity embraces some viewing integrity. The point is to become detached from the particular aspects in which plants and animals usually appear to man on account of their usefulness or functions in human activity (the way a hunter views a pheasant may serve here as an example of this single-aspect mode of viewing). It is about a positive perception of nonhuman beings as multi-faceted creatures which lead their own kind of existence, responding in their own unique way to specific environmental circumstances that they have to deal with.[24]

[22] See ibidem, p. 120n.

[23] Ibidem, p. 122.

[24] Taylor writes: "Insofar as we are able to achieve wholeness of vision in our grasp of an organism's uniqueness, we come to know the life of that individual as it is lived by it. We then conceive of it as a complete, many-faceted being carrying out its own mode of existence, responding in its own way to the particular circumstances confronting it" (ibidem, p. 127).

This kind of change in human attitudes serves to extend the human consciousness. It is about this moment when man can develop in himself greater sensitivity to the world of nonhuman beings. As Taylor claims, as he acquires the capacity to adopt the viewpoint peculiar to other creatures, he is in a position to make a judgement based on their own good. Taylor writes:

> Seeing them as we see ourselves, we are ready to place the same value on their existence as we do on our own. If we regard ourselves as possessing inherent worth, so will we be disposed to regard them.[25]

2.4. Man as an equal to other beings

Taylor's last thesis challenges man's superiority over other beings. The philosopher is convinced that if we have accepted the previous propositions, then we should be inclined to accept this last one. Still, he makes a further attempt at demonstrating the legitimacy of this conviction.

Taylor observes that the assertion about man's superiority over other living entities results from the conviction that he possesses certain properties that they do not possess. However, the problem he discerns here is that an argument like this can be turned against man. He does not possess that which nonhuman beings possess, or he does possess that but in a much more limited scope. A possible solution to the problem is the proposition that the characteristics possessed by man are of greater value than those found in plants and animals. Rationality, aesthetic creativity, individual autonomy, free will may be recognised as uniquely human properties testifying to his superiority. But the philosopher asks: to whom and on what grounds are these characteristics valuable? There is no doubt that their significance is assessed from the human viewpoint, in the context of human life and fulfilment. But when man adopts the

[25] Ibidem, p. 128.

above-mentioned attitude, that is he views plants or animals from their viewpoint, he is likely to arrive at completely different conclusions.[26]

This look at nonhuman beings from their own viewpoint reveals that the only reliable method of assessment is to refrain from using human values as the measure. It is necessary to employ values that are appropriate for them, their species and their fulfilment. Hence, the good that is appropriate for, say, a family of chimpanzees delineates the criteria for assessing a member of this group. The degree to which a given entity realises this good determines the degree to which it can be considered better or worse than another entity in the same species. Taylor says that a given being may be assessed as superior to another one provided that both fall under the same assessment standard.[27] Plants and animals cannot be regarded as inferior to humans if they do not fulfil that which humans do. The goals pursued by human beings are not the ones that other beings set out to pursue.

In the philosopher's opinion, the intellect that human entities possess cannot be the characteristic that tips the scales of value in their favour. Man needs intellectual powers in order to realise his human good and pursue his human goals. Thus, it is the property without which he could not be himself. This, however, cannot be said of other beings, sensitive or vegetative ones. For they realise their own good and pursue their own goals: they do not need the intellect for their existential fulfilment.[28] As Taylor observes: "that the realisation of the Human Good requires a proper use of reason in the guidance of life tells us nothing about the worth of the lives of those living things whose end is not the Human Good."[29] The philosopher makes an attempt at subverting the conviction

[26] See ibidem, p. 130.

[27] See ibidem, p. 131.

[28] However, even the absence of active powers of reasoning does not mean that these beings do not act rationally. Through observation we know that the functions they perform (e.g. eating, defence or reproduction) are in a way rational and belong to some rational order which is knowable and the operative principles of which can be established. Thus, rational tendencies are in a way intrinsic to the life of animals.

[29] P. W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature…*, op. cit., p. 137.

firmly embedded in the European philosophy, whereby rational beings fulfil a special function. He states the following: "we must realize that rationality is but one capacity of a certain class of living things which depend on exercising it for their well-being."[30]

Taylor is consistent in propounding the thesis about species equality, which is of fundamental significance for his concept. Both plants and animals and humans have the same inherent worth. On the strength of this, we people have the same *prima facie* obligations towards them as well as towards other people. The good of plants and animals must be taken into account as seriously as the good of *Homo sapiens* entities. Thus, the philosopher formulates the principle of species-impartiality, as he asserts the following: every species that inhabits the Earth is of equal worth, has the good equal to others, and that good enforces on the agent an equal degree of commitment. The good of individual beings should be preserved and safeguarded as an end in itself. All beings have equal inherent good and hence no good can be assessed as superior or inferior.[31]

3. A critical look at the theses of species egalitarianism

The above-presented views by Paul Taylor touch on the essential issues concerned with the outlook on the surrounding world. And so they merit careful consideration, at least in several crucial aspects. This need for reflection also results from the very character of the theses that constitute his biocentric view. They give rise to controversy, thereby provoking profound consideration. Therefore, on the one hand one can discern in them questionable propositions that require critical viewing. On the other hand, the theses indicate presence of some crucial premises that need to be accepted whenever integral reflection on man and his place in the natural world is undertaken.

[30] Ibidem, p. 138.
[31] See ibidem, p. 155.

Beginning with the latter view, it needs to be stated that the human being has a lot in common with the environment, which has its resonance in the thought of the philosopher in question. Indeed, man can be recognised as a member of one of the species inhabiting the Earth. Among the living beings, he appears as one of the biological organisms, even though – and this needs to be emphasised – he is something more than just a biological organism. The environmental conditions in which the human entity functions are common to all existing organisms. Man undergoes similar stages of being born, growing and passing away; he is subject to manifold disease and other environmental determinants, just like animals. Hence, saying that the human being is a certain kind of an animal is in a way legitimate.[32]

Also, the statement that the human species lives in a certain relationship with not only the environment *sensu largo*, but with specific plant and animal species is self-evident. Man not only simply needs specific living beings for his survival, as a source of food, but also many a time benefits from that which other species contribute to the natural environment. His life's chances of auspicious development are greater when the harmony with other species is not upset, or when he can eliminate or rectify the abnormalities that creep in.

The thesis that every organism is a teleological centre of life, which strives to realise its own good understood as a goal does not seem to stir up controversy either. A biologist is likely to agree with that, stating that all organisms, as they are members of specific species, have their own stages of development and it is a matter of the natural course of things that they attain them (allowing for some occasional anomalies), which, for instance, can be helpful when determining their age. A philosopher too will agree that a given being strives after its goal (*telos*) and the goal is a certain good (i.e. fulfilment of existence). Such an equation of good

[32] This proposition is likely to be accepted by biologists, but also by philosophers, beginning with Aristotle. As regards the contemporary version of the Aristotelian thought, the thesis about man as an animal is espoused by Patrick Lee. A chapter in one of his books is entitled: "Human Beings Are Animals." See P. Lee, R. P. George, *Body-Self Dualism on Contemporary Ethics and Politics*, New York 2008, pp. 4–49.

and a goal can be found in Aristotle.[33] This goal-good, although defined in its essence by the dynamics of a given species, comes to be concretised in a given individual. It strives after its own fulfilment and many a time it does it in a unique way. This slight specificity as to tendencies across all species is discernible and so one can find that every entity in one way or another displays individual features.

However, Taylor's theses may raise some serious doubts too. These actually arise with the fourth thesis. The philosopher states that typically human characteristics cannot serve as the measure with which to determine the value of nonhuman beings. Such beings must be assessed according to their own categories. Neither the human-specific rationality or autonomy, nor aesthetic creativity or free will can lead us to the conclusion that the fact that animals or plants do not possess them makes their axiological status inferior. With regard to the inner aspect, which has been presented so far, this seems legitimate. Every being has its own *telos* which determines what is required to fulfil it. One might say that the measure of a given being's value is the way it strives after its own good and how it fulfils it, and not the way it looks in the light of another being's *telos*.

However, rigorous compliance with this requirement demands that one refrains making any comparisons between different living beings. The point is not only about giving up judgements whereby man is someone superior to and better than animals or plants, or vice versa, which in effect means giving up any positive-negative interspecies judgements. It would also be necessary to give up passing any evaluative judgement. But Taylor does pass a judgement like this. In his conclusion, the philosopher formulates the principle of species equality, that is he points to the necessity to recognise that all species are of equal value.[34]

[33] Aristotle addresses good as a goal in the context of human action (see Arystoteles, *Etyka nikomachejska*, trans. D. Gromska, Warszawa 2000, no.1094A), but it seems that this in general can be related to natural becoming as well.

[34] Paul Taylor's deliberations might lead to different conclusions. In substantiating his theses, he pointed to the weaknesses of *Homo sapiens*: they appeared late in the world, dominated other species and are engaged in destruction of the biosphere; their departure

This is a position of axiological egalitarianism. From it, Taylor even derives a peculiar imperative determining the necessity to become involved in the protection and promotion of every type of being in an impartial manner.

The consistent thing to do would be to refrain from expressing an evaluative thesis which goes beyond members of the same species. One might at most say that one chimpanzee is more perfect than another chimpanzee, because it realises the goal-good of this species in a better way. But one should not compare the chimpanzee to the human. And so one cannot say whether it is better, worse or equal in value to man. It would be best to say that it is different. And that is the conclusion presented by David Schmidtz as he comments on Paul Taylor's theses. He claims that the first three are acceptable, but the fourth one is not. Recognising that we are members of the Earth's community of life, which is about an extensive network of relationships with other beings, and that we are teleological centres of life does not necessarily have to lead to the conclusion about being equal to the whole biosphere. Supporting the thesis about equality is not the only way to have respect for other beings. Recognising them as different beings who have their own *telos* and good is enough to take actions concerned with care and respect for them.[35]

Another accusation that can be levelled at Taylor's theses is the emerging incommensurableness of the particular theses. The last one, which concerns species equality, is clearly of a total character: it expresses a conviction about the status of all species. However, that which leads to the thesis, i.e. the relevant premises, has been derived by way of selective choice. On the one hand, Taylor clearly relegates to the background some important aspects of man's free and rational action. On the other hand, he demands that we take an integral look at plants and animals, recognising

will have a healing effect on the Earth's community of life. From this it follows that it is better to recognise human beings as a suspicious species and not grant them a status equal to that of other beings. From this perspective, man can be simply recognised as a worse part of the natural environment.

[35] See D. Schmidtz, *Are All Species Equal?*, [in:] *Environmental Ethics. What really Matters, What really Works*, ed. D. Schmidtz, E. Willott, New York 2002, p. 96n.

them as multi-faceted beings (the third thesis). The philosopher takes this measure to emphasise only those characteristics that we have in common with animals and plants.[36] It is a form of partial reductionism (in relation to some section of beings - *Homo sapiens* beings) and apparently it has been performed purposefully. One might therefore ask if such a selective presentation of the human being justifies drawing such a far-reaching conclusion. For it seems that the premises underlying the last proposition were deliberately devised, which means that already at the starting point the philosopher might have known the ultimate conclusion.

It is in this context that Schimdtz accuses Taylor of unjustified minimalism and a selective approach to the premises in formulating the theses concerned with the biocentric position. Schmidtz claims that it is an illegitimate move whereby firstly the characteristics common to all living beings are enumerated; and then propounded is the thesis that it is only them that are of moral significance; and finally it is stated that on account of this all living beings are equal with regard to their worth. There may also be other characteristics which are possessed by only some beings and which determine their different axiological status.[37] That is the case of the human being. That which Taylor reduced – in the aspect of the higher functions of human freedom, rationality and aesthetic creativity – may be the thing that in fact justifies man's different axiological status.

4. Towards axiological pluralism

How could one come to know this dissimilar axiological status and reveal it? Well, it seems justified to presuppose that this dissimilarity in the goods possessed is something internally conditioned. It results from

[36] Taylor straightforwardly states: "We do not deny the differences between ourselves and other species […], we keep in the forefront of our consciousness the characteristics we share with all forms of life on Earth" (P. W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature…*, op. cit., p. 101).

[37] See D. Schmidtz, *Are All Species…*, op. cit., p. 98.

the inherence of some inner ontic value in every animate being.[38] So as to avoid the naturalist error, it is right to accept that the value is not a natural quality or anything derived from it.[39] The one accompanies the other, but recognising their presence is essentially a matter of two different types of predication. Cognition of natural states is usually about acquiring some information; cognition of values is about noticing the importance of a given being. As regards this, personalists claim that acquiring cognition of a given thing in the empirico-informational aspect always involves noticing its axiological status.[40] It is cognitive-emotional states that inform the cognition-acquiring agent about that. As we become cognisant of something, we always form an opinion (as a set of information) as well as an emotional reference to the thing, some kind of an emotional attitude. To us, the thing always acquires some meaning, becomes revealed as some importance (of one or another kind, greater or lesser). More often than not, the way this happens is that the more thoroughly one explores a given thing in the empirical aspect, the more the relevant value becomes revealed to our intuition. As we gather information about something, we acquire the feeling of its significance and import.

This is particularly important with regard to plants, animals, and especially humans. These beings never appear to us as pure states of affairs or sets of information. We always approach them as certain good-values, and even though this approach accompanies empirical cognition, it is never its derivative: it appears as if incidentally to the process of information gathering. The attitude concerned with the feeling

[38] See W. Galewicz, *O dobru drzew i ekologicznej reformie utylitaryzmu*, [in:] *Świadomość środowiska*, ed. W. Galewicz, Kraków 2006, p. 41.

[39] It is not certain whether Taylor would presuppose that. His deliberations about the inherent value come very close to pronouncements on natural characteristics: having some inherent value on account of belonging to the biotic community of the natural ecosystem. See P. W. Taylor, *Respect for Nature…*, op. cit., p. 78n. There would be no naturalist error here, if it was demonstrated that the biotic community of the natural ecosystem is characterised by good in itself, and is not just some factuality, or a natural state.

[40] See J. Merecki, *Naturalizm etyczny. Błąd naturalistyczny*, [in:] *Powszechna encyklopedia filozofii*, ed. A. Maryniarczyk, vol. 7, Lublin 2006, kol. 531n.

of importance is "constructed" in us in parallel, in a different sphere of cognition-experience.

Next, it needs to be admitted that if living beings appear as certain values, then these axiological states require adequate explanation, or providing some rationale. In other words, if it is striking that living beings appear as certain goods, then there must be some kind of explanation for this experience. For instance, in regard to the human being, personalists are likely to say the rationale for axiological experience can be furnished by anthropological reflection. As Tadeusz Styczeń writes: "anthropology [...] provides the rationale but no premises for ethical theses, for the ethical theses are the premise behind it [...], while it is the conclusion."[41] In "reductive logic" – propounded by this philosopher – the starting point is an experience of man's special value, which though surprising (and in practice burdensome by "appealing" for a change in conduct) necessitates some explanation. Though given, it is not self-explanatory. Thus, naturally it provokes quest for the rationale.

> If [...] the rationale - adds Styczeń - proves to be "human nature," then its acceptance is above all a matter of accepting that which can solely and ultimately explain, or to put it differently, consistentise the fact of its content that the experience of morality informs us about.[42]

As it addresses the issue of human nature, the concept of man gives rise to the possibility of providing a rational explanation for apparent valuableness of man. There seem to be good reasons to pronounce on plants and animals likewise: their good-value may find its ultimate consistentisation in the structure of their being, even though – like in the case of man – this value is neither derived nor deduced therefrom: it is given in direct experience.

The axiological experiences concerned with the existence of plants, animals or human beings should actually themselves convey to us which

[41] T. Styczeń, *Antropologia a etyka*, [in:] idem, *W drodze do etyki*, Lublin 1984, p. 126.
[42] Ibidem.

being is more perfect. In most cases that is what happens; people are usually quite firmly convinced that the values become arranged in the following hierarchy: first a human being, second an animal, and then a plant. This hierarchy, which results from an intuitive reading of the essence of every being, can then be explained away (consistentised by way of providing ultimate reasons) by referring to the nature of plants, animals and finally human beings.

It may also happen that this axiological reception is not clear, or even disrupted for some reasons.[43] Thus, there can even arise some dispute whether in reality – say – the human being is more valuable than the chimpanzee. On the plane of the reception of the good-value, this dispute may be irresolvable. The parties to the dispute will declare disparate axiological experiences. The only way to eliminate the disparity will be to say that either of the parties to the dispute has wrongly recognised a value, and so what we are dealing here with is an axiological illusion or even axiological blindness. However, such an approach is unsatisfactory. There is little that it resolves as it points to the cognitive and emotional immaturity of either of the parties (though asserting that someone is wrong is legitimate).

It is necessary to resolve the dispute by having recourse to the arguments substantiating one thesis or another about a good-value. Even though arguments themselves do not reveal axiological experiences, they can serve to prove that such and such an experience is true. A false experience (resulting from an axiological illusion) will be lacking in proper ultimate arguments. There will be nothing justifying it or justifying it adequately. Moreover, it is easier to conduct a confrontation between the arguments (by determining their strength) than between axiological experiences. Arguments can be cognitively analysed so that they can be divided into better and worse ones, appropriate and illusive

[43] The reasons may be cultural (absolutisation of evolutionary thinking and the resultant conclusions) or concerned with the outlook on the world (religious or *quasi*-religious convictions about the equality of animals), which result in the "blurring" of the axiological hierarchy.

ones. Given this perspective, it appears that an intersubjectively reliable debate might be possible.

The settlement of the dispute – say between naturalists and personalists – over who is more valuable, the human or the chimpanzee can thus be effected not on the plane of comparison and confrontation of relevant axiological experiences, but by undertaking an analysis of their (man's and chimpanzee's) natures and of the arguments thus obtained. These arguments will become a form of verification of the conflicting experiences. They will reveal which ones are adequate, and which ones are not. Unlike the first type of cognition, which was related to conflicting axiological experiences, looking for arguments must be systematic and thorough. One should avoid making presuppositions or provisional reductions which might narrow the field of cognition in an *a priori* manner, which is the case of Paul Taylor.

Referring to the integral structure of specific (plant, animal and human) beings, therefore, affords a chance to justify the varied axiological status and formulate appropriate rights and obligations. That is a method that can prove to be very useful in making the transition from the position of axiological egalitarianism of the biosphere to the position of axiological pluralism, which more accurately renders the wealth of the world we live in.

Abstract

The paper takes up Paul W. Taylor's theses (beliefs) concerning the relations between human beings and the environment. First thesis sets forth that humans are members of the Earth community of life; second, humans are interrelated with other species; third, all organisms are teleological centers of life tending to fulfill their inner good; fourth, humans are equal with other living creatures. These theses are analyzed in-depth and critically assessed. Most controversial is the last belief. It implies that all living creatures have the same value and should be treated equally. The paper shows that these assertions are not viable. More realistic is the idea that natural living creatures differ as far as their values are concerned. Hence, in the paper is undertaken an attempt to figure out a method

of disclosing these axiological differences, starting from a personalist model describing mutual relations between anthropology and ethics.

Key words:
environmental ethics, biocentrism, species egalitarianism

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